



Fresh and Well Presented

**An Interview with Maria Razumich-Zec,
Regional Vice President, USA East Coast,
The Peninsula Hotels;
General Manager, The Peninsula Chicago**



EDITORS' NOTE Since March 2002, Maria Razumich-Zec has served as General Manager of The Peninsula Chicago and assumed her current post with The Peninsula Hotels in May 2007. Prior to this, she served as Managing Director and Hotel Manager at the New York Palace Hotel. Before this, she was Resident Manager of the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago and also held positions at the Chicago Hilton and Towers, the Waldorf=Astoria in New York, and the Hilton at Short Hills (New Jersey).



Maria Razumich-Zec

Razumich-Zec holds a B.S. in business management and a B.A. in French from Purdue University.

PROPERTY BRIEF The Peninsula Chicago (www.chicago.peninsula.com) has been recognized as a premier property with Forbes' Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond awards since its grand opening in 2001. The property boasts 339 luxurious guest rooms and suites furnished in a contemporary yet classical style and offers a 15,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, as well as four distinctive restaurants and a bar, 24-hour room service, a ballroom, and seven additional meeting and event rooms. The Peninsula Chicago is managed by The Peninsula Hotels (www.peninsula.com), which operates luxury hotels throughout Asia and the United States.

You have been a leader in the hospitality field for more than two decades. What advice would you give to someone aspiring to be a hotel general manager?

I would ensure that you have passion for the hospitality field and for hotels. This is an exciting profession and can open many doors for you throughout your career, but the hours are long and there are many steps to walk before you can become a general manager. Be creative and do not be afraid to let your opinions be known. Treat everyone you work with equally and with respect. Develop strong relationships with your customers and treat them exceedingly well. Once you have developed yourself as a leader, surround yourselves with smart, hard-working, fair professionals who can assist you in setting and managing the hotel's goal and objectives. Don't be afraid to take chances. And if you fall, get up, shake it off, and go back to work.

Your owners continually invest in the property to enhance its offerings and maintain

your leadership status in the market. Would you highlight some of the projects you have planned?

The Peninsula Hotels Group has always reinvested money back into all of its properties. I'm convinced that this strategy contributes to the reputation of The Peninsula Chicago for being well maintained. We want our hotel to feel like it just opened. In fact, even after 10 years, we frequently hear from our guests that our hotel feels like everything is fresh and well presented. Having said that, we always seem to

have one or two enhancement projects underway.

We just finished updating our seven Grand Deluxe Suites, located on the northeastern corner of the building, with captivating views overlooking Chicago and Michigan Avenues. The redesigned Grand Deluxe Suites remain true to the original Art Deco interiors while infusing an even higher level of residential luxury. Rich walnut veneers accented with dark lacquers are combined with couture upholstery fabrics to create an urbane palette of warm grays, cool violets, and deep sienna browns. The response we have received from our guests has been overwhelmingly positive. We are also renovating one of our two Grand Suites in a similar style and color palette.

Starting in early 2012, we are renovating Avenues, our former restaurant, into a Junior Ballroom, which will accommodate up to 120 guests for a dinner event and 130 for theater-style seating and it has magnificent views of Water Tower Park and the John Hancock building.

What new service initiatives are you looking to implement?

We are always looking for the next service initiative that we can offer our guests in anticipation of their ever-increasing requirements. We currently have two MINI Coopers that are available to our suite guests for a three-hour chauffeur driven experience to explore the city. In addition, we plan to add a bespoke BMW house car in the spring of 2012, which our frequent guests will appreciate. In our food and beverage operations, we have noted that our guests are seeking unique and memorable dining experiences that offer a great value. In The Lobby, we have attractive three-course menus for lunch and dinner that offer great value with a variety of choices. We are in the process of implementing local deliveries of catering items from our European café, Pierrot

Gourmet. There is a market in the surrounding business buildings and local residential community for deliveries from our unique bistro.

In addition, we have recently expanded our entertainment program in The Lobby. We now have musicians entertaining guests seven days a week.

How does the hotel rate in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR)?

We have implemented a number of CSR initiatives. The categories include sustainability and purchasing efforts, community relations, training efforts, and environmental areas. We have a Green Team consisting of employees at all levels and from various departments. Most of its efforts have focused on the back of the house, including composting in the kitchens, cardboard balers, motion-detector lighting, and paper and plastic recycling. We have implemented sustainable purchasing efforts and we buy locally whenever possible.

Our CSR programs always aim to have a favorable influence on the local community. We work closely with a number of charities, including the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Illinois, Children's Memorial Hospital, Hephzibah Children's Home, Common Threads, Alzheimer's Association, Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly, Lynn Sage Cancer Research Foundation, and others. We just hosted a party at the Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly facility in Chicago. Our chefs prepared a luncheon for the elders that was served by various members of our staff.

What are the future plans for Peninsula Hotels?

Our company is always looking to expand into new markets. However, we do not develop multiple properties per year. Instead, Peninsula evaluates opportunities carefully and thoughtfully and only adds new properties if all the conditions are ideal. In the past few years, we have opened remarkable properties in Tokyo and Shanghai. Our next hotel is scheduled to open in Paris in 2013. Like all Peninsula Hotels, it will have an amazing location – in this case, on Avenue Kleber, just steps from the Champs-Élysées and Arc de Triomphe. We intend it to be a modern yet Beaux Arts-style hotel with a very sophisticated and elegant ambience. This will be our company's first foray into Europe and I expect it will be a landmark hotel. ●

The Peninsula Chicago lobby (right); selections from Chocolate at The Pen (left)